



## Ross on Wye Angling Club

### AGM MINUTES

#### White Lion - 19.30hrs, 7 Dec 2022

1. **Apologies** – Will Mynott; Tom McCulloch, Peter Craven, Ash Bailey, Ray Bailey.
2. **Introduction:** Introduction of Committee members.
3. **Previous AGM minutes** – signed off as accurate.
4. **Chairman's Annual Report**

**President:** Patrick Darling, our former President passed away on 10 Oct.

Patrick supported the Club in many ways. He came to the occasional Committee Meeting, worked with me on river pollution issues and pursued the Club interested at MP level. His estate also provides the Club with fishing opportunities on the Sellack beat outside the salmon season. We hope to continue our long relationship with the Darling family in the future.

**General Fishing Report:** Mixed reports for the 2022 season. From the information I have gleaned over the year, catches of the larger barbel seem to be down, numbers of smaller barbel caught seem to be increasing and the chub are plentiful. The poor river conditions we had this summer likely contributed to the low barbel catches. Notable reports include a perch of 4lb, pike of 23lb, a haul of 10 barbel (with a double figure fish amongst them), a 8lb chub and a session that included 23 small barbel on the float (by my son).

**New Town Swims:** Through (literally) years of work, mainly by former Committee member Kim Harman, we have had three environmentally positive swims built in the Wilton Bridge area. They include bank re-enforcement made of natural willow. We received significant financial support from Ross on Wye Town Council and also the AONB. We have permission from the EA and Natural Resources England to build more swims in the Town section and plan to start this in Feb/March 2023.

**Benhall:** Primarily through Gary's hard work, we have established good relationships with the tenant farmers on our Upper and Lower Benhall beats. New signage was commissioned and installed by Gary and Colin. It directs anglers from both the car park and motorway access to the fishery along the designated routes.

**Bailiffs:** We welcome an additional bailiff, Chris Dowling, a local member who joined us this year (who I believe caught a double figure barbel from Weir End on his first outing) and say goodbye to David Haworth. Thank you for this support and work this year. If there are any local members wanted to help bailiff the waters, then please contact Mike Evans, our head bailiff.



**Wildlife Monitoring:** Our wildlife monitoring continues into 2023 and is run by Peter Richardson. It's a Whatsapp Group open to all members who post bird, insect and mammalian life they see during fishing trips. This data is collected by Peter and the bird records are passed on to the British Trust for Ornithology as part of their broader surveys. It's a fun group to belong to, and anyone wishing to join should contact Peter.

**Membership Costs:** In light of our new 25-year lease, and the associated temporary fixed rents and the current inflationary economic environment, we are pleased to be able to hold all our 2023 membership and day ticket rates at the 2022 level. There will be no increases for next season.

**Bank clearing:** Through Colin and Gary we have had four bank clearing sessions this season. Thanks to those guys for organising and thanks also to Wes for providing the 'heavy equipment' and expertise we have needed on a few occasions. The primary support for these events seems to be from Committee Members. I would be very grateful if for 2023 all local members could lend their support to at least one of the bank clearing sessions. It is a great way to meet other members and to increase your knowledge about the river. Special thanks go to Mike our head bailiff and Mick Palfrey who take it upon themselves to maintain the banks, especially at Weir End, in their own time.

**Tree planting:** This year, in cooperation with Ross Town Council we planted reeds and over 50 trees along our banks to help protect the river from erosion and to encourage wildlife.

**Risk Assessment/ Health & Safety Representative:** In the past, the Club lacked a proper risk assessment and implementation plan. We now have a professionally endorsed Risk Assessment published on the website with agreement to the terms and conditions implicit with Club and Day Ticket membership. We are fortunate to have Adrian, a Health & Safety expert to guide us on this journey and will be proposing a permanent position for him on the Committee later in the meeting.

**Trophies and Competitions:** The Club has had a chest full of trophies stored (at Club expense) with Lloyds bank for years. We have collected these and closed the storage arrangement. Some of them are stunning; lots of history and made of pure silver. By agreement, we plan to display some of them here in the White Lion. And during the 2023 Season, John Cheyne will be organising some friendly competition days on the river. These will include species challenges and 'biggest fish of the day' and will focus on junior involvement and will encourage members to bring their children along for the day. The trophies will be presented at the end of the day.

**Own Water:** Our quest for ownership of our water has continued throughout 2022, and the committee has produced a still-water acquisition strategy and selection criteria to ensure we choose the right venue. The committee visited two local farm ponds and several occasions, but neither proved to be suitable. Our search for a special still water and our own stretch of river will continue for 2023. We would be grateful for any information from local members regarding suitable venues for the Committee to investigate.



## Relationships

Throughout 2022 we have maintained and expanded our relationships with:

- Local Angling Shops;
- Tenant farmers who manage the land across which we have access;
- Ross Town Council;
- Angling Trust;
- River Action;
- Several Local River Campaign groups;
- Yorkley Angling Club;
- The Duchy (now Prince William);
- The Darlings at Sellack;
- Local and national media, including the BBC and ITV.

**River Pollution:** It won't have escaped members' attention that along with most of the rivers in the UK, our River Wye is suffering from an overload of phosphates. The scientific work that has been done estimates that 30% of this is from untreated sewage and 70% is from poor farming practices. Primary sources are likely from the chicken excrement spread on to the field due huge increase in poultry farming in the catchment, and the fields that are left 'brown' due to potato and maize farming in the winter flood seasons.

The impact has been easy to witness. Algal blooms, brown sludge on what was once clean gravel and a huge decline in habitat-supporting water crowfoot.

Trevor Hyde has been continuing his weekly phosphate monitoring on behalf of the club (now been doing it for almost three years), the data from which feeds into a larger collection system. Results have varied throughout the year. During the dry summer this year, some of the readings were zero. However, as soon as we get rain, the excess phosphates from the fields wash into the rivers causing sustained increases in phosphate levels, sometimes by as much as 64 times the prescribed legal limit.

Although the solutions to the problem are obvious, they are not easy. We have profit-driven, foreign-owned water companies whose financial planning includes money to pay fines as opposed to investment in sewage infrastructure and capacity. We have powerful overseas companies who own the poultry industry and we have some farmers ignoring rules and their responsibilities as well as the cross-border 'blame game' between the EA and NRW. Lots of people are making lots of money and are using the Wye as a dumping ground. Coupled with this, we have an underfunded EA and a government who seem to have little interest in rapid environmental improvement. In addition, Fish Legal, the body Ross Angling Club commissioned to present a legal challenge against the river pollution, forcing NRW to admit that the poultry industry part of the pollution problem in the catchment. The 'so what' of this, is now that they have been forced to admit they know the cause of the problem, they are obliged to do something about it. It is going to be a long war, so Ross Angling Club is in this for the long game. To me, it feels like we are at the bottom, so the only way is up. The EA have had their budget increased, the issue is becoming political, with parties prioritising river and ocean improvements on their manifestos and the public dissatisfaction with the status quo is ever increasing. So, I am hopeful.



**Media/Campaigning:** Coupled to this has been our engagement with the media, the EA and the political classes. On behalf of the Club, I have been on BBC radio and national TV a number of times in 2022, clearly stating the impacts we as anglers have witnessed. I have also held a workshop with senior EA staff, with the aim of focussing their limited resources to tackle the primary causes of the problems. Since then, we have called the EA directly with reports from members indicating illegal farming practices. Two of these cases have resulted in investigations by EA officers and punitive measures were taken. Of interest, the farmers involved were heavily berated by the local farming community for their infringements.

In addition, I was invited to spend a morning with Alex Sobel, Labour MP (Environmental Audit Committee), a meeting organised by Angling Trust. Alex showed a keen interest in the problems the river is facing and vows to reverse the decline through stringent rule enforcement and fines, the proceeds of which will fund the enforcement activities (Net cost zero).

We are fortunate to have amongst our membership a former PR/Media professional; Mark Harrison, a member from Oxfordshire. He is responsible for promulgating our activities to the local and regional press and has submitted 5 articles this year regarding the plight of the river and the Club's activities. His articles have appeared in the Hereford Time, Ross Gazette and as copy for BBC Midlands.

**River Closures:** The river conditions during the hot, dry summers, coupled with the algal blooms caused by the phosphates dictated that had we close the river to protect the welfare of the fish. Ross Angling Club is fortunate in that we have such varied waters along our 5 miles: From numerous fast shallows and shaded areas to sections well over 8 feet deep, even when the river is at its lowest levels. This means that the fish in our section can often move to an area that suits them best. We have learned that the most critical metric for fish survival is Dissolved Oxygen. Fortunately, both this year and last year, the EA were able to share with us the live DO data from the sonde in Ross. This has enabled us to track water temperature against DO. After much debate, and learning from the past 2 seasons, coupled with the expertise John Cheyne brings, we have agreed criteria for closure and subsequent re-opening. It is a delicate balance between providing quality angling for our members, while limiting stress to our precious fish. However, we are confident that the fish in our water are quite comfortable with temperature in the low 20s °C.

**Plans for 2023:** As well as the usual management of the club and the banks, next year will see us continue the quest for our own water and adding to the town swims. We have already had the offer of a very kind donation from the family of a local angler that will be used to support the new swims, along with Club investment. The river pollution campaign will continue as we strengthen new alliances, especially with the Angling trust. We will be relying on members to support ongoing bank entry maintenance and there are moves to encourage junior anglers and more Club cohesion through friendly competitions.

That is the end of the Chairman's report for 2022. I will take questions at the end of the meeting.



## **5. Secretary Annual Report**

This has been a busy year for the committee, with well-attended meetings in February, April, June, September, October and November, as well as a bailiff's meeting in January, a social event in September, and a number of bank inspections and work parties involving lots of club volunteers to maintain the pegs.

In addition to the suite of activities described by the Chairman, one of the key changes we made was in February when we terminated the reciprocal arrangements we had with other clubs in the region. This decision was made because the systems wasn't working well, was difficult to manage and enforce, and was not being used by many members from this club. Feedback from the other clubs was supportive and agreed with the move.

The club renewed its annual membership of the Angling Trust.

## **6. Treasurer Annual Report** (Excel spreadsheet report available on request)

Income from membership and ticket sales this year was as expected and was boosted by grants from the local and Hereford councils for the new platforms. Given the summer conditions, day ticket sales rose to around the running average. This year the committee negotiated selling day tickets with the farmers at Upper Benhall, on a 50:50 basis - previously guests at the farm fished for free. Guest tickets were slightly up on last year but are not significantly high.

Unsurprisingly, the number of senior members is increasing with a corresponding fall in the number of non-senior members. The changes are not huge but over time will result in a fall on income from membership subscriptions, which will need to be addressed. There remain slightly more country members than local, but this does not have a significant impact on the overall income.

Expenditure - there were three large areas of expenditure this year, the town swim platforms, purchasing membership cards before the price rise with enough to cover the next two years, and registering our lease with the Land Registry.

Overall, the club remains in a sound financial position. Given that income and, hopefully, day ticket income will be about the same next year along with, as yet, no planned large expenditure, it is proposed that all subscriptions remain the same for 2023.

## **7. Membership Secretary Annual Report**

2022 saw another year of fully subscribed membership, with 350 paid members. Salmon membership was fully subscribed at 35, plus 315 coarse-only members. In addition to paying members, we currently have five honorary members and seventeen juniors.

Paying membership is pretty much equally divided between "local" members (171) and "countrywide" members (179).

We have 94 members paying the concessionary senior citizen rates, but the actual number of members aged 65 plus is higher because members only qualify for the concessionary rate after five years' continuous membership.



Our waiting list currently stands at a record number of 185, reflecting the current national demand for access to coarse fishing on the Wye. The waiting list still includes a handful of applicants from 2018, indicating a current likely waiting time of three to four years from time of application. Our churn rate is relatively low. We recruited 44 new members from the waiting list in 2022 to replace old members who did not renew – a turnover rate of just twelve-and-a-half percent. The waiting list includes 25 local applicants and seven prospective salmon members.

We continue to use Clubmate as our online membership portal and the vast majority of members have paid their subscriptions and established/renewed their memberships online, helping to minimise the administrative work required of the club.

The committee has proposed changes to the club's membership year as detailed in the AGM agenda item 8 and these will be implemented if approved by the members here present. The committee has decided to leave subscription rates and membership numbers unchanged for the 2023/24 season pending review as part of the club's ongoing financial and structural planning during 2023.

#### **8. Salmon Section Annual Report**

I first if all wish to thank Trevor Hyde for the considerable help given in putting this report together. As you probably know, Trevor organises the salmon section of the club, co-ordinates salmon catches and sends out a weekly text to salmon members giving prospects for fishing for the coming week. He also undertakes weekly phosphate testing on our waters for the Wye Salmon Association. These results combined with results from other parts of the catchment provide hard evidence of the pollution currently affecting the River, and are used to try to put pressure on the NRW and EA to take some meaningful action.

The salmon fishing in 2022 for most of the Wye was very difficult with catches down on last year due to persistent low water levels combined with hot sunny weather. It was only the low water beats below Monmouth that fared better, particularly Wyesham and Bigsweir. Here 352 salmon were recorded, up from 129 in 2021. But in the 110 miles of recognised salmon fishing water from above Monmouth up to Rhayader, only 75 salmon have been recorded this year (199 in 2021). That is just one salmon for every 1.5 miles of water! As a result many of the beats in the Middle and Upper River blanked including famous beats like The Carrots and Builth Wells. Ross club managed three fish, all caught in April.

Comparing ourselves to our close neighbours up and downstream, Backney zero, Foy/Creel 1, Goodrich Court 8, Middle Hill Court zero and Wyebank/Courtfield 3.

*(All catch figures shown are as reported by the Wye and Usk Foundation)*

As a result of the low water and hot sunny weather, water temperature in the summer increased exceeding 23 degrees Celsius (73 degrees Fahrenheit) on several occasions. This can be dangerous for fish especially salmon, and a number of salmon died including in our waters at Ross. To try to alleviate the situation and protect the coarse fish as well, club waters



were closed for fishing for about 6 weeks in two spells during July and August and the authorities took the unusual step of releasing water from the Elan Valley reservoirs in an effort to re-oxygenate the River to help the struggling fish.

At the start of the salmon season on 3<sup>rd</sup> March we had good river levels and high expectations. But other than a small insignificant rise in mid-May there was no meaningful rain until October. In consequence river levels fell steadily to summer low then drought levels. After April hardly any salmon seemed to be running the river with only the very occasional fish being seen in our waters.

The salmon caught by our members:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Captor</b>	<b>Fish weight</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Location</b>
4 <sup>th</sup> April	Trevor Hyde	25 lbs	Spinning (Flying C)	Hom Pil
6 <sup>th</sup> April	Jon Daniels	12 lbs	Spinning (Flying C)	Brighton Rock
20 <sup>th</sup> April	Steve Boswell	20 lbs	Spinning (Flying C)	Hom Pil

NB: The Brighton Rock fish was first from there for many years.

These salmon were measured not weighed, so weights are estimated based on published weight/length ratios. This ensures that after netting the fish were kept in the water and returned as quickly as possible to avoid injury.

For the first time in many years you will no doubt notice no salmon were caught on the fly on our waters.

This year's low catch means the 5-year average for the club waters will drop to just 5 fish, down from 9. But both averages are a long way away short of the club's catch in 2016 when we had good conditions and 44 fish.

Understandably the hot weather and low water had a marked impact on the fishing effort by club members. From the entries recorded in the book in the salmon hut along with phone calls and emails, all co-ordinated by Trevor, it appears that only a handful of members have fished this season. With such poor conditions and very low catches for the third year in a row, the consensus is that some salmon members will be lost to the club. Trevor has, however, confirmed that next season he will continue to send out his weekly texts to the salmon members giving prospects for fishing on our waters for the coming week.

On a positive note and ignoring the low water and high water temperatures, the river seemed in better health than in recent summers. The water was generally clear with little algae, there were masses of small fry in the margins and the Ranunculus was trying to re-establish itself. This had the knock on effect with increased numbers of kingfishers and swans on our water showing a successful breeding year for both species. Also 14 of the 17 phosphate readings taken by Trevor during the summer in our water recorded zero phosphate. We believe this was due to the lack of rain to wash the fertilizers and slurry applied to fields into the river. In



addition the water companies combined sewer outlets should not have operated during this period. But, since the October rains, Trevor has once again reported spikes in Phosphate levels with readings as high as 13 times the prescribed limits. All of this I will report to the EA and NRW at the next Wye Local Fisheries group meeting where I represent the club.

Role on 2023, and let us all hope that for once we for some decent fishing conditions throughout the season and most importantly fish to target.

## 9. Motions Notified in Advance

- a. Proposed changes to memberships dates from 2023 season.
  - i. Coarse fishing: Annual membership starts 1st April, with a renewal window 1st April to 30th April (season 16th June to 14th March).
  - ii. Salmon fishing: Annual membership starts in 1st February, with a renewal window 1st January to 31st January (season 3rd March to October 17th). If we don't fill salmon membership, we give extra spaces to be filled to the coarse waiting list.
  - iii. Members will have a few months of free fishing due to the changes.
  - iv. Change the date of the AGM to March, so next AGM in March 2024.

### Vote

Proposer - Julian Lane

Secunder - Kim Harman

21 for

3 against

0 abstentions

### VOTED FOR

## 10. Motion to maintain current Committee members

Proposer – Mic Palfrey

Secunder – Kim Harman

### UNANIMOUS – VOTED FOR

## 11. Election of Officers and Committee

- a. New H&S Position available

Motion to appoint a Health and Safety Officer as a non-executive Officer and to the committee.

This requires a change to Clause 4.1 of the constitution as follows:

### 4. OFFICERS

4.1 *The officers of the Club shall be as follows:*

*President - an honorary position*

*Executive Officers consisting of:*

*Chairperson*

*Vice Chair*

*Secretary*





*Treasurer*  
*Membership Secretary*  
*Non-executive Officers: Head bailiff; Health and Safety Officer*

To ensure there remains the correct balance of officers to other members of the committee, it is proposed that the number of other members is increased to 7 and the quorum required for business of the meeting to 8 members. These changes require a modification of the constitution, in particular clause 6.1.1 and 6.1.4 as follows

## **6 GENERAL COMMITTEE**

6.1 *The affairs of the Club shall be controlled by a General Committee:*

6.1.1 *The General Committee is comprised of the executive and non-executive officers of the Club and seven other members elected from, and by, the members of the Club.*

6.1.4 *The quorum required for business to be agreed is 8 members including at least two executive officers.*

### **Vote**

Proposer – Gary Kent

Seconder - Trevor Hyde

**UNANIMOUS – VOTED FOR**

## **12. Honorariums**

Executive Officers to continue to receive honorariums for work on behalf of the committee.

### **Vote**

Proposer – Kim Harman

Seconder – Paul Clifford

**UNANIMOUS - VOTED FOR**

## **13. A.O.B.**

**Trevor Hyde – are we happy with how the website is run?**

Trevor is not getting photos, so Nick will send a reminder to members to send photos of their fish.

**Have the committee considered a new President?**

Yes – we are considering another President from the Darling family, but it is still a sensitive time for them. It is a constitutional matter and the committee will report to the members when we have some proposals.

**MEETING CLOSED**